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ABSTRACT

Since January 1971, a number of colleges and universities have announced time-shortened degree programs. In the interest of examining and clarifying the various approaches to and understanding of time-shortened degrees, this brief analysis is offered. There appear to be 4 approaches to the reduction of time spent on the way to the B.A. degree, one of which is the more usual reduction through compression without any fundamental change in degree requirements. The other major approaches involve such methods are (1) reduction through the award of advanced standing with credit; (2) reduction of the elapsed time required for a secondary diploma and a bachelor's degree by cooperation between high schools and colleges; and (3) reduction through a revision of degree requirements. Such time-shortened degrees do have their problems, however. These include: (1) possible crippling of general education; (2) a danger of continued emphasis on time-serving and credit accumulation rather than competence and personal development; (3) the anticipated savings may be illusory; and (4) the potential fiscal perils in the private sector are great. (HS)

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REPORT ON TIME-SHORTENED DEGREE PROGRAM

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Several educational premises seem to underlie the development of time-shortened degree programs: (1) Many entering students now arrive on campus physiologically, intellectually, and academically far in advance of the freshmen who enrolled a generation ago; (2) Entering students are today particularly well advanced in the field of general education, making it possible to reduce significantly the time devoted to this aspect of the curriculum without a diminution of quality in the bachelor's degree; (3) Because of the earlier maturation of today's youth, it should be possible to complete in the secondary schools an even greater proportion of courses of general education now covered in college during the first and second years; (4) Increasingly today there is much learning which takes place outside the classroom and which can be evaluated for academic credit; and (5) A three-year baccalaureate program based on the academic attainments of such students and attuned to their greater social and intellectual maturity will be more challenging and more meaningful to them.

It is important to note that much of the experimentation with time-shortened degrees is not a simplistic shortening of the time-frame. Rather, the notion of reviewing the collegiate time-frame in relation to secondary curricula has brought about a significant reexamination of the objectives of undergraduate education. Accordingly, as much experimentation with degree definition and curriculum content is going on as with various time-frames and delivery systems. While this report deals principally with the time-frame, therefore, it should not be assumed that all new programs are only modifications of the number of years required for the degree.

In 1971 the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education reported that "We are convinced that the time spent on the way to the B.A. can be reduced now by one year for many, and subsequently most, students...."[1] The report went on to say:

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[1] Less Time, More Options: Education Beyond the High School. McGraw-Hill Book Co., January 1971, p. 11.

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> High schools can be accredited by state university systems and by consortia of private colleges to give the equivalent of the first year of work in college. Gradually this could be expanded to cover all, or nearly all, high schools. Fifty thousand high school students are now given credit each year for advanced standing in college. This should quickly be expanded to at least 500,000. Summer-term study can be made available in colleges for those who do not go to accredited high schools or who have not completed a year of college level work in accredited high schools. The first year in college can also be made more challenging and useful. Thus the lower division in college could soon become a one-year program except for those needing remedial work.... [2]

Since January 1971 a number of colleges and universities, presumably in response to the Carnegie Commission recommendations, have announced time-shortened degree programs. In the interest of examining and clarifying the various approaches to and understanding of time-shortened degrees, this brief analysis is offered.

There appear to be four approaches to the reduction of time spent on the way to the B. A. degree, one of which is the more usual reduction through compression without any fundamental change in degree requirements. The other major approaches, however, consist of a variety of responses to the problem of inadequate articulation between secondary school and college. That is, all of them recognize that there is considerable repetition at the college level of general education covered in high school.

Generally, there are three responses to the articulation problem: a reduction of time through the award of advanced standing with credit; cooperative efforts by high schools and colleges to reduce the elapsed time required for a secondary diploma and bachelor's degree; and a reduction of time through a radical revision of degree requirements and educational program.

1. Reduction through compression. With this approach there is a reduction in elapsed time from entry to completion of the degree program by one or a combination of two formulas but without any change in degree requirements: (a) the year-round calendar, and (b) intensified or increased course loads. The number of units required for graduation (courses, hours, etc.) is not reduced appreciably.

a. Completion of a degree in three years by year-round attendance has always been an option, particularly in institutions offering twelve-week summer sessions. However, the adoption of the trimester calendar introduced three terms of equal length and facilitated the teaching of courses under the more relaxed schedule of the

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[2] Ibid., pp. 15f.

traditional semester during the third term. Essentially, year-round operation provides for as much academic work to be completed over less elapsed time as the traditional four-year program with two semesters or three quarters. Despite the advantage of such operation, the number of institutions utilizing it has remained fairly constant since 1967 -- about seventy-five or so.

b. The acceleration of academic degree programs through increased course loads has also long been an option in many institutions, particularly for the able or highly motivated student. This was possible under the credit-hour system but became virtually impossible with the widespread adoption of the course unit system which generally limits students to three or four courses per term. Now the practice is reappearing as a privilege accorded the high achiever. A good example is Ripon College's three-year plan. Under Ripon's plan a student must acquire a 2.75 grade point average while carrying 18 or 19 hours per semester for a total of 112 semester hours. However, all work must be taken in residence at Ripon and advanced standing by testing is disallowed.

2. Reduction through the award of advanced standing with credit. The principle of the award of advanced standing with credit appears to be based essentially on the assumption that it should be possible to evaluate and give credit for knowledge and skills gained prior to or outside of college either through formal schooling or self-education and experience.

a. Advanced Placement Tests. For many years, since 1955 in the case of Harvard, colleges and universities have granted advanced standing in college courses, sometimes with credit, on the basis of testing for work done at the secondary level. Much of the college level subject matter introduced at the secondary level since Sputnik came about as a result of Harvard's early testing program and subsequent advanced placement courses and tests devised by the Educational Testing Service. The number of students achieving substantial credit and advanced standing has always been relatively modest considering the total entering college from high school, and relatively few students managed to shorten the course by a full year.

b. College Level Examination Program. A more significant development than the Advanced Placement program has been the recent use of CLEP examinations by several major institutions, including the University of Utah, the University of Miami, and San Francisco State College. Originally, devised by ETS as an instrument to evaluate skills and knowledge gained in informal ways (life experience and self-study), the CLEP exams were offered to the entire entering class of Freshmen free from charge and thus became an instrument for evaluating work taken at the secondary level in terms of collegiate norms. Substantial numbers took the examinations, many of whom qualified for advanced standing with credit. Thus surprising numbers were able to shorten the bachelor's degree program by as much as a year.

3. Reduction of the Elapsed Time Required for a Secondary Diploma and a Bachelor's Degree by Cooperation Between High Schools and Colleges. This scheme appears to assume two forms, one in which high school students, generally twelfth graders, are allowed to enroll in courses of neighboring colleges while continuing their studies in high school and the second in which twelfth grade students are admitted to the first year of college as full-time students.

a. Enrollment of high school students in college courses. Generally, colleges utilizing this approach arrange with surrounding school districts to allow high school seniors to take college courses for a portion of the total academic program while completing the remaining requirements for a high school graduation at their high schools. Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, developed such an arrangement with neighboring school districts as early as 1966. At the SUNY College at Fredonia students from neighboring high schools take three college courses each semester and accumulate eighteen college credit hours in the senior year which may be applied at Fredonia or transferred to another college.

b. Admission of twelfth grade students to the first year of college as full-time students. The SUNY College at Albany has established an "independent college" to which have been admitted twelfth grade students from a number of high schools in the state. During the first two years of collegiate work the student will complete the requirements for high school graduation and win admission to junior standing. This plan enables students to complete the requirements for high school graduation and college in seven years. The curriculum is organized around an interdisciplinary study of the major institutional structures and processes of society. At Shimer College in Illinois 35% - 45% of the entering class have completed the eleventh grade.

A variant of this approach is that which has been developed at Simon's Rock College in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. There students are admitted following the completion of the tenth grade in high school. The college program is four years long. As yet. however, the college has not been accredited to award the bachelor's degree. It appears to be the only institution which has implemented the assumption that the best years for general, humanistic, and liberal learning for at least a good proportion of able students come between the ages of 16 and 20.

4. Reduction through a Revision of Degree Requirements. A number of institutions are adopting time-shortened programs which are designed to accept students directly from high school. Most of these programs are not designed for an academic elite but, rather, are expected to enroll nearly all of their students.

Some colleges, e.g., SUNY College at Geneseo, are simply eliminating thirty hours of general education requirements, thereby reducing from 120 to 90 the number of credit hours necessary to earn a baccalaureate degree.

Others are developing entirely new curricula to suit a three-year degree program. For example, at the SUNY College at Brockport a variable modular calendar and an interdisciplinary and problem-oriented general education program will be the basis for the new degree program. California State College, Dominguez Hills, is also developing a new three-year curriculum. A new SUNY campus at Rome-Utica is projected to develop another three-year baccalaureate degree program designed to accept students directly from high school.

Potential Problems of Time-Shortening. It should be apparent by now that the three-year B. A. means many things. Criticisms applicable to one scheme may have little, if any, relevance to others. However, there are several potential problems which should be noted.

First, there is a possible crippling of general education, as Kenneth Conklin points out, where general education course requirements are arbitrarily reduced by up to thirty hours. The supposition that general education objectives are adequately met at the secondary level is not yet fully justified, at least for a great many students completing secondary school, studies of curriculum articulation to the contrary. Exposure to a variety of course work in the humanities social sciences, mathematics and natural sciences may not suffice at all in the increasingly sophisticated and complex civilization in which we live.

However, there are some time-shortened degree programs, particularly those involving cooperation between high school and college and those involving radical reform of the educational process, which may minimize, if not avoid, this potential difficulty.

To some students of higher education, general education is only meaningful in the context of a disciplinary based curriculum which places a premium on specialization. Conceivably, liberal education organized around different conceptual paradigms might eliminate the need for general education altogether.

Second, there is a danger of continued emphasis upon time-serving and credit accumulation rather than competence and personal development. That is to say, continued emphasis upon the length of time required to earn a B.A. degree or upon the accumulation of credits -- in this case, a reduction of both in three-year degrees -- does nothing to guarantee the student's level of understanding or competence. And in the matter of personal development it suggests less opportunity for maturation.

What some critics of time-shortening argue is that we need flexibility in the matters of time and courses required for the degree so that some students might qualify for the degree in less than three years and some in four, five, or six years. Such flexibility is to be achieved, they say, by a more precise formulation of degree objectives, e.g., the skills and competencies sought, attitudes and personal values realized, maturation achieved, and the like.

Degrees carefully defined in behavioral, intellectual, and effective terms may be susceptible to more meaningful assessment and certification than time-serving and course-credit oriented degrees.

Third, the anticipated savings may be illusory. The fiscal rationale for time-shortened degrees in the public sector rests on the assumption that the cost of education to the public and to the student will be less, to say nothing of the less tangible social and individual economic benefit gained by adding an additional year to a student's working life.

Some critics argue that the net savings will be negligible due to several factors. First, the implementation of new programs designed for time-shortened degrees will likely produce high start-up expense, in most cases substantially above the educational cost per student in regular, on-going degree programs. Second, student satisfaction with current patterns of education, both at the secondary and collegiate levels, may mean that only a small number of students will wish to accelerate their programs, either by eliminating the final year of high school or foreshortening the college experience. Third, efforts to provide enriched educational experiences for undergraduates in time-shortened programs will likely produce higher costs per student.

Whether these assumptions -- pro or con -- will prove valid is a question only time and experience can answer. However, it is clear that institutions considering time-shortened degrees should weigh carefully the arguments of the skeptics before full implementation.

Fourth, the potential fiscal perils in the private sector are great. If time-shortened degree programs become the norm for the public sector, with the savings in time and expense to students anticipated, the effect upon the prospects for survival of many institutions in the private sector may be devastating. Unless independent institutions develop comparable programs the cost-to-student gap between public and private institutions will increase substantially. However, should private institutions adopt some forms of time-shortened degrees, e.g., an actual reduction of cost credit hours by one quarter, with the potential effect of reducing enrollments by at least a fifth, they may experience great difficulty in compensating for the loss by enrolling larger entering classes. This is particularly true at this time when both public and private, but particularly private, institutions are experiencing short-falls in enrollment and when students appear to be skeptical of experimental degree programs.

Accreditation and the Time-Shortened Degree. There is every indication that regional accrediting agencies are adopting a "wait-and see" attitude towards time-shortened degree experiments. There is obviously much interest in them and the associations are prepared to give advice when requested. Several suggestions are offered here relative to the accrediting agencies: (1) Consult with your regional association for advice but not in the sense of prior

approval or prejudgment; (2) Assess carefully the effectiveness of your educational program before changing to a new program; and (3) Develop adequate measures for assessing future outcomes which have some correlation with past evaluative instruments. There is every reason to believe that regional associations increasingly will evaluate educational programs on the basis of actual outcomes rather than the rhetoric of catalog statements. As an aid to self-analysis, the American College Testing Program and the Educational Testing Service have both developed comprehensive institutional self-study programs and, in addition, the regional accrediting commissions are developing more adequate instruments and methodologies for institutional self-assessment.

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